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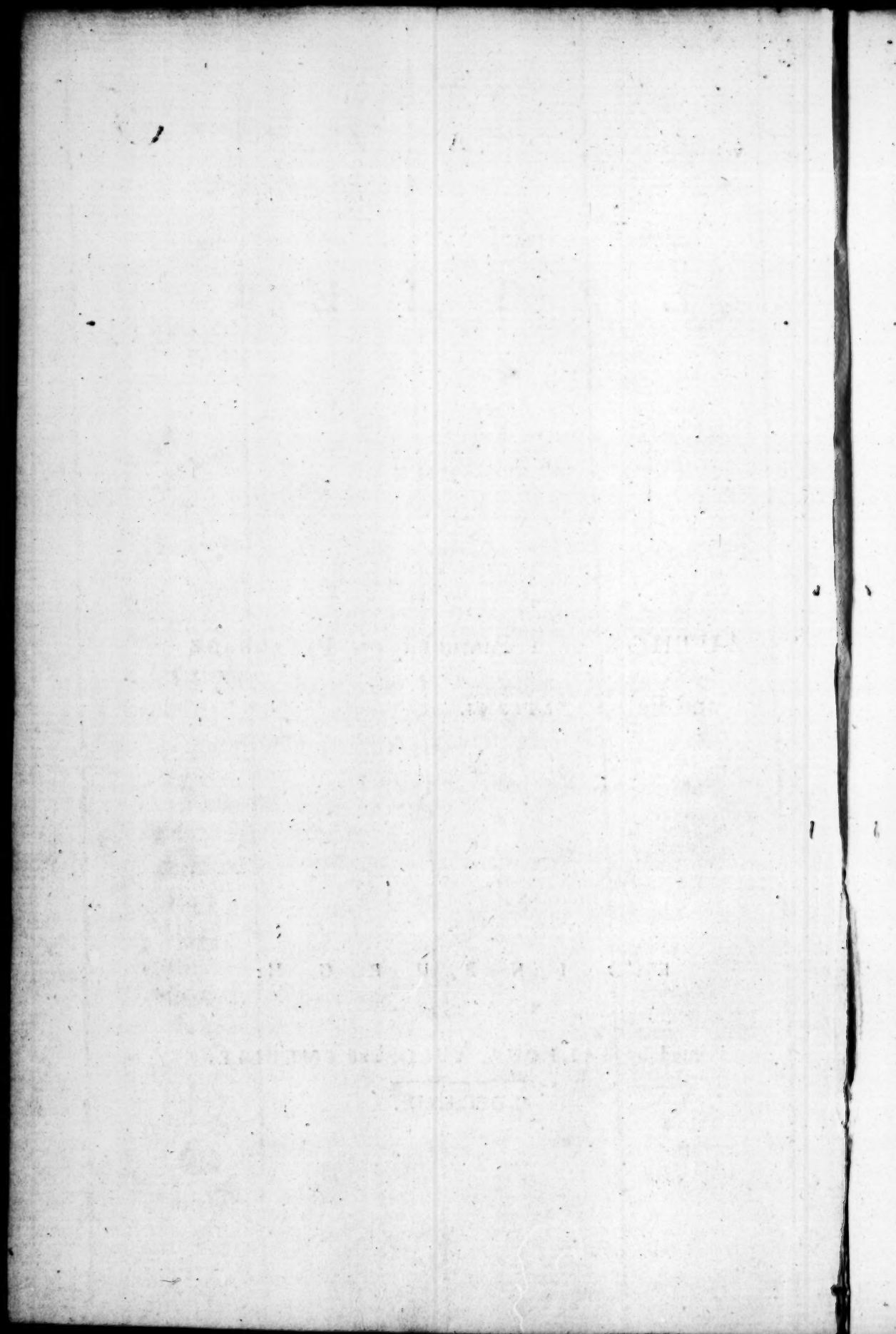
TO THE

AUTHOR of a Pamphlet on PATRONAGE  
and PRESENTATIONS.

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M,DCC,LXIX.



*Edinburgh, May 15. 1769.*

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L E T T E R, &c.

S I R,

I HAVE considered your thoughts on patronage and presentations, suggested, as you say, by an overture of the last General assembly on the subject. This performance will no doubt be universally attended to, if it were only from respect to the committee of that assembly by whom it has been adopted and transmitted to presbyteries. I must however take the liberty to differ from you in opinion as to some  
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propositions which you advance, and to offer my reasons for doing so.

Your sentiments I fully approve of, when you speak of "the great importance of religion to the happiness of mankind," of "the importance of an established order of men to instruct them, and to form their ideas with respect to religion, to imbue them with the principles of religion, and to form their manners according to its dictates."

I suspect that you reason unsoundly in the deduction you have made from thence, "that the man to whom the people are willing to listen," you certainly meant to say, "most willing to listen, is of all others the most proper for these purposes." I will venture to say, that many are the cases in which he is the most improper.

If, in spite of the most pure religion, vice and corruption prevail much in the Christian world, it is not harsh or indecent to suppose, that the bulk of men ought to be treated as diseased patients. Would it be safe to trust a man in a dangerous illness with



with the choice of his physician? No! his friends, who are cool, are certainly the proper persons to chuse for him; probably he would decide in favour of the Quack or Mountebank Doctor, whom he had seen a little before playing his tricks on the stage. Neither would it be safe, that the patient should prescribe his own medicines, diet, or regimen. In spiritual matters the danger is still greater.

In some parishes of Scotland, the trade of smuggling has gone on at a great rate; in other words, the trade of thieving from the public. In carrying it on, not only seamen and fishermen, but farmers and their servants, must be actively concerned in the night, when other thieves are at work, and often on the Lord's day. From a parish of smugglers, What choice of a minister can we expect? Surely, any other than of a worthy man, who, from a principle of conscience, would talk much to them about the great, but despised duties of living soberly, righteously, and Godly in the world. They would chuse a man, if such was to be found, who would flatter their prejudices, let alone their vices, or  
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whose mouth could be shut at any time by a share of the spoil.

In some parts of the kingdom the Antinomian tenets, condemned by this church, are still in great reputation ; and, except in a very few counties, the tide of the common people runs in that channel. Hence the distinction made betwixt preachers ; some of whom, by preaching always in the Antinomian strain, or one nearly approaching it, are called popular preachers : While others, whose great study it is “ to imbue “ them with the principles of the religion, “ and to form their manners according to “ its dictates,” are stiled moral, fashionable, or polite, epithets usually bestowed in the way of reproach. What can induce any young man, upon his entering into the ministry, to throw off his natural good sense, and take up with popular jargon, I cannot see, except by falling into the same mistake with yourself, “ that the man to “ whom the people are willing,” *i. e.* most willing, “ to listen, is of all others, the “ most proper for instructing them,” or to the desire of standing high in their estimation, knowing that their clamour may ob-  
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struct his settlement, and that their united support may perhaps carry it swimmingly on. It is much to be apprehended, that the commonalty of Scotland have been too much the guides of the clergy, and have imbued them with their peculiar principles, while they ought to have stood forth, modestly, in their own proper character as the guides of their people.

In another place, you say very properly, "That the office of a minister, is to instruct all his parishioners without distinction, in the principles of religion." And, after an enumeration of the duties to be performed by him, you are pleased to add, that "to qualify him for these duties, polite literature and elegant erudition will be of no use." I suspect that many of your readers will look upon these two propositions to be contradictory.

Were the attentions of the ministerial office wholly confined to the illiterate and laborious peasants, or were the middle rank as illiterate at this present time as they were half a century ago, I would subscribe to your last assertion. But among the country-

country-farmers at this day, there are numbers to be found, sensible, judicious, and knowing. And it is but doing justice to the country gentleman to allow, that as some are learned and penetrating, so many of them are very acute, and have got into the habits of reading, thinking, or talking freely about religion. When they go to church, they do not expect to be entertained with polite literature, or elegant erudition. And I may venture to affirm, that, owing to the good sense or indolence of the clergy, they almost never meet with it. But, without polite literature and elegant erudition, a clergyman is scarcely qualified to bear a part, as the world now goes, in the company of laymen, let his piety or stock of practical divinity be ever so great, especially if the conversation should turn on religion. Papists and Schismatics in Scotland are generally men of little learning; on which account, I think it was unnecessary for you to make an exception in their behalf. Your smart free-thinkers and rude assailants of religion, hold up their head in all companies where they expect no controul. Is polite literature and elegant erudition of no use to a clergyman on such occasions?



occasions? Most assuredly by their aid he will maintain his ground more firmly when attacked; or probably his very presence will check the first motions of the adversary.

I beg, Sir, to be of opinion, that in such an age as the present, when loose principles on morality and religion are become too prevalent and fashionable, polite literature and elegant erudition are become almost essential in the composition of a clergyman. I have too much candour to suppose, that, by your strong assertion on this head, you mean any harm to religion. But I know both laymen and clergymen who will infallibly make this conclusion to your disadvantage. Pray, Sir, could any man, who wished well to the interests of religion, at a period when it was so rudely attacked, think it a matter of indifference, whether there should have been Lelands, Butlers, and Sherlocks to defend it? It is true, that the Scottish clergy are remarkably diligent in the private duties of their office. But I aver, let their diligence be ever so great, they must have many idle hours, and these often sitting very ungracefully upon them; unless they are fil-

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led up by the pursuits of polite literature, and elegant erudition, they must be politicians or farmers ; for some relief from business every man naturally desires. Besides, if infidelity go on in this country at the same pace with which it has set out, their polite and elegant accomplishments, which you are pleased to vilify, will have subject enough to work upon. I am far from thinking that such accomplishments rest in the personal reputation of the possessors ; in the use of which they are to a clergyman independently of his own profession, I am clearly of opinion, that polite literature and elegant erudition have a direct tendency to enlarge the understanding, to improve the heart, to detach from those low pursuits in which clergymen, to their great dishonour, sometimes engage, servile adulation of the great, an unconscientious grasping at the applause of the vulgar, or the less innocent employment of either secretly or openly tearing one another. Nay, I beg to be of opinion, that these pursuits are directly useful to a clergyman in his own profession, by preserving him from spleen and languor, by enlarging his stock of ideas, and improving his knowledge of  
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human nature, that key to the heart ; in short, by giving a vigour and variety to his pulpit-performances, whence he will be qualified not only to instruct, but with greater advantage to persuade and animate his hearers.

From several passages in your performance I must conclude, that you have had the education of a gentleman. Proceeding on this supposition, I was greatly surprised to find you asserting as follows: ‘ Such being the essential qualifications of a minister, it will rarely happen, that either patrons or principal heritors will be sufficient judges, from their own knowledge or experience alone, whether a candidate for a settlement possesses them or not. The middle rank of people are best qualified of any, to judge of the talents of pastors.”

I am really, Sir, at a loss to imagine in what corner of this kingdom you live, or who are those patrons and principal heritors with whose ignorance and incapacity you are so perfectly acquainted. Do you hastily conclude, *a priori*, that they must be insufficient judges of the qualifications of a candidate? From what premises? Is it that their station, their opulence, and  
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affluence debilitate their understandings, and incapacitate them for knowledge and observation? Are they to be viewed as destitute of common sense and sagacity? Have they no interest in the qualifications of their minister? Have they not souls to be saved? Are they wholly unsusceptible of religious impressions? Do not all of them wish to have occasionally a sensible and worthy clergyman to converse with? For my part, I seldom ever knew a clergyman of virtue and ability whose merit was not seen and duly valued by the gentry with whom he is connected. A defect in either of the two is more easily discerned by them, than by the middle rank of men, whose judgment is often rash, and whose approbation is often capricious. By your plan of humbling the influence of the nobility and gentry in the choice of ministers, you evidently mean to break one of those ties which connect them together, at a time, when, for the interest of religion, the connection ought rather to be strengthened by every honourable mean. Do you suspect that the young clergy are in danger of becoming too free and fashionable by this intercourse? I shall venture to assure you,  
Sir,



Sir, that no such consequence will follow: I never knew, nor ever heard of a scoundrel clergyman of any denomination, popular or unpopular, receiving quarter at the hands of a profligate heritor. I have been told that the officers of the army, few of whom are great saints, hold an immoral chaplain in the highest detestation, and have such reverence for a man of worth, that they behave with the strictest decorum in his presence.

But pray, Sir, What are those talents of a pastor of which a sensible heritor may not judge as thoroughly and soundly as any tenant or cottar on his estate? You say, his talents in catechising and visiting the parish, in attending on the sick, in being the friend, and, in some measure, the companion of each of his parishioners. You are a layman, on which account I can the more easily excuse you, for not knowing, or not remembering, that of these talents in a probationer, no person can have an opportunity to pass judgment before ordination, and till he has been for some time settled in a parish. Till he is collated, the ministers in the presbytery are the only proper, the only legal and constitutional judges of  
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his qualifications ; or, in your own words, " how far he is qualified to exercise the " pastoral office, in the particular circum- " stances of that parish to which he is pre- " sented." His pulpit-talents, his character, his life and conversation, all have access to know before the moderation of a call, and all have talents to discern, according to the measure of good sense and honesty they possess, whether patrons, heritors, or tenants. If humanity, good sense, and a certain tenderness of disposition, are useful, if not necessary talents, for discharging the private duties of the pastoral office, I cannot see how the gentlemen in a parish should be less qualified to judge of them than the meanest parishioner ? Had I an interest in the settlement of a parish, and were to devolve my judgment on another, I would not hesitate a moment to which of these two I would give the preference ?

For the middle rank of people, as distinguished from patrons and principal heritors, you produce a plea of merit very new and extraordinary, consisting of two branches : They are the fittest judges of the talents of pastors, say you ; *first*, Because they possess  
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some knowledge of their own: *Secondly*, Because, possessing this, they are also able to feel those powers of instruction which are apt to produce the greatest effects on those of the lowest class.

I am quite at a loss to conceive what knowledge of their own those of the middle rank, as distinguished from the nobility and gentry, possess, by which they are enabled to feel the powers of instruction in a higher degree. If you are not only a layman, but a lay-elder, and a member of this ensuing assembly, in justice to yourself, you must be more explicit on this head. I have no manner of doubt, that on this, and other mysterious assertions contained in the pamphlet, you may be presented with opportunities of explaining yourself. The gentry in Scotland are able, if they please, to defend themselves against the charge which you have brought against them. Perhaps they may have the talent of discerning that you have brought it out only to serve a turn, and may generously forgive you.

But I beg to remind you, that, among the noblemen and gentlemen who are either  
patrons

patrons or principal heritors, there are, in our days, names distinguished for intellectual ability, learning, virtue, attendance on divine institutions, respected deservedly by the clergy, and even by the middle rank of people, whom you invidiously set up in competition with them, nay, to whom you are pleased to give the preference in judging of the talents of pastors. Some of these, Sir, sit in that house where your system of novelties will fall to be canvassed.

A. B.

F I N I S.